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Decision File

One for the C.I.A.

The Freedom of Information Act cannot be used to pierce deep shadows over at the Central Intelligence Agency, according to a recent appellate court decision.

Nathan Gardels, a student at the University of California, wanted to know what kind of arrangements the agency has with the state university. Documents related to "overt contacts" were released, but the C.I.A. refused to confirm or deny any contact with the university. Mr. Gardels, still curious, took his case all the way to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia.

The court accepted the agency's argument that disclosure of the existence of college contacts could produce problems ranging from foreign agents investigating faculty members to foreign countries preventing its citizens from attending a particular American school.

"The Freedom of Information Act, the court concluded, "does not require the C.I.A. to lighten the task of our adversaries around the world by providing them with documentary assistance from which to piece together the truth."

Michael deCourcy Hinds
